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Who am I?

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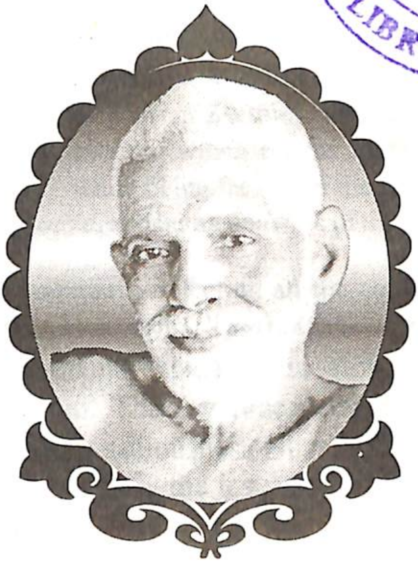

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By
Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi

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WHO AM I?

EVERY living being longs always to be happy, untainted by sorrow; and everyone has the greatest love for himself, which is solely due to the fact that happiness is his real nature. Hence, in order to realize that inherent and untainted happiness, which indeed he daily experiences when the mind is subdued in deep sleep, it is essential that he should know himself. For obtaining such knowledge the enquiry.'Who am I?' in quest of the Self is the best means.

'Who Am I?' I am not this physical body, nor am I the five organs[1] of sense perception; I am not the five organs of external activity[2], nor am I the five vital forces[3], nor am I even the thinking mind. Neither am I that unconscious state of nescience which retains merely the subtle *vasanas* (latencies of the mind), while being free from the functional activity of the sense-organs and the mind, and being unaware of the existence of the objects of sense-perception.

Therefore, summarily rejecting all the above-mentioned physical adjuncts and their functions, saying 'I am not this: no, nor am I this, nor this that which then remains separate and alone by itself, that pure Awareness is what I am. This Awareness self is by its very nature *Sat-chit-Ananda*, (Being-Consciousness-Bliss).

If the mind, which is the instrument of knowledge and is the basis of all activity, subsides, the perception of the world as an objective reality ceases. Unless the illusory perception of the serpent in the rope ceases, the rope on which the illusion is formed is not perceived as such.[4] Similarly, unless the illusory nature of the perception of the world as an objective reality ceases, the vision of the true nature of the Self, on which the illusion is formed, is not obtained.

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1 The eye, ear, nose, tongue, and skin, with their respective corresponding functions of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch.

2 The vocal organs that articulate speech and produce sound, hands and feet that govern the movements of the physical body, anus that excretes faecal matter, and the genital organ which yields pleasure.

3 Which control respiration, digestion and assimilation, circulation of blood, persipiration, and excretion.

4 This analogy is based on a traditional story of a man who sees a rope in the twilight and mistakes it for a serpent and is therefore afraid without cause.

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The mind is a unique power (*sakti*) in the Atman whereby thoughts occur to one. On scrutiny as to what remains after, eliminating all thoughts, it will be found that there is no such thing as mind apart from thought. So then, thoughts themselves constitute the mind.

Nor is there any such thing as the physical world apart from and independent of thought. In deep sleep there are no thoughts: nor is there the world. In the wakeful and dream states thoughts are present, and there is also the world. Just as the spider draws out the thread of the cobweb from within itself and withdraws it again into itself, in the same way the mind projects the world out of itself and absorbs it back into itself.

The world is perceived as an apparent objective reality when the mind is externalized, thereby forsaking its identity with the Self. When the world is thus perceived, the true nature of the Self is not revealed: conversely, when the Self is realized, the world ceases to appear as an objective reality.

By a steady and continuous investigation into the nature of the mind, the mind is transformed into *That* to which the "I" refers; and that is in fact the Self. Mind has necessarily to depend or its existence on something gross; it never subsists by itself. It is this mind that is otherwise called the subtle body, ego, *jiva* or soul.

That which arises in the physical body as 'I' is the mind. If one enquires whence the 'I' thought in the body arises in the first instance, it will be found that it is from *hradayam*[5] or the Heart. That is the source and stay of the mind. Or again, even if one merely continuously repeats to oneself inwardly 'I-I' with the entire mind fixed thereon, that also leads one to the same source.

The first and foremost of all the thoughts that arise in the mind is the primal 'I'-thought. It is only after the rise or origin of the 'I-thought that innumerable other thoughts arise. In other words, only after the first personal pronoun, 'I', has arisen, do the second and third personal pronouns ('You , he',etc.) occur to the mind; and they cannot subsist without the former.

Since every other thought can occur only after the rise of the 'I-thought and since the mind is nothing but a bundle of thoughts, it is only through the enquiry 'Who am I?' that the mind subsides. Moreover, the integral 'I'-thought, implicit in such enquiry, having destroyed all other thoughts, is itself finally destroyed or consumed, just as the stick used for stirring the burning funeral pyre is consumed.

Even when extraneous thoughts sprout up during such enquiry, do not seek to complete the rising thought but instead, deeply enquire within, 'To whom has this thought occurred?' No matter how many thoughts thus

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[5] The word *'hrdayam'* consists of two syllables, *'hrt'* and *'ayam'*, (centre-this which signify ' I am the Heart'.

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occur to you, if you would with acute vigilance enquire immediately as and when each, individual thought arises to whom it has occurred, you would find it is to 'me'. If then you enquire 'Who am I?' the mind gets introverted and the rising thought also subsides. In this manner as you persevere more and more in the practice of Self-enquiry, the mind acquires increasing strength and power to abide in its Source.

It is only when the subtle mind is externalized through the activity of the intellect and the sense-organs that gross name and form constituting the world appear. When, on the other hand, the mind stays firmly in the Heart, they recede and disappear. Restraint of the out-going mind and its absorption in the Heart is known as introversion (*antarmukha-drishti)*. The release of the mind and its emergence from the Heart is known as extroversion (*bahirmukha-drishti*).

If in this manner the mind becomes absorbed in the Heart, the ego or 'I', which is the center of the multitude of thoughts, finally vanishes and pure Consciousness or Self, which subsists during all the states of the mind, alone remains resplendent. It is this state, where there is not the slightest trace of the 'I'-thought, that is the true Being of oneself. And that is called Quiscence or *Mouna* (Silence).

This state of mere inherence in pure Being is known as the Vision of Wisdom. Such inherence means and implies the entire subsidence of the mind in the Self. Nothing other than this and no psychic powers of the mind, such as thought reading, telepathy and clairvoyance, can be Wisdom.

Atman alone exists and is real. The threefold reality of world, individual soul, and God is, like the illusory appearance of silver in the mother of pearl, an imaginary creation in the Atman. They appear and disappear simultaneously. The Self alone is the world, the 'I' and God. All that exists is but the manifestation of the supreme.

For the subsidence of mind there is no other means more effective and adequate than Self-Enquiry. Even though by other means the mind subsides, that is only apparently so; it will rise again.

For instance, the mind subsides by the practice of *pranayama* (restraint and control of breath and vital forces); yet such subsidence lasts only as long as the control of breath and vital forces continues; and when they are released, the mind also gets released and immediately, becoming externalized, it continues to wander through the force of its subtle tendencies.

The source of the mind is the same as that of breath and vital forces. It is really the multitude of thoughts that constitutes the mind; and the 'I'-thought is the primal thought of the mind, and is itself the ego. But breath too

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has its origin at the same place whence the ego rises. Therefore, when the mind subsides, breath and vital forces also subside; and conversely, when the latter subside, the former also subsides.

Breath and vital forces are also described as the gross manifestation of the mind. Till the hour of death the mind sustains and supports these forces in the physical body; and when life becomes extinct, the mind envelopes them and carries them away. During sleep, however, the vital forces continue to function, although the mind is not manifest. This is according to the divine law and is intended to protect the body and to remove any possible doubt as to whether it is dead or alive while one is asleep. Without such arrangement by nature, sleeping bodies would often be cremated alive. The vitality apparent in breathing is left behind by the mind as a 'watchman'. But in the wakeful state and in *samadhi*, when the mind subsides, breath also subsides. For this reason (because the mind has the sustaining and controlling power over breath and vital forces and is therefore ulterior to both of them), the practice of breath-control is merely helpful in subduing the mind but cannot bring about its final extinction.

Like breath-control, meditation on form, incantations, invocations and regulation of diet are only aids to control of the mind. Through the practice of meditation or invocation, the mind becomes one-pointed. Just as the elephant's trunk which is otherwise restless, will become steady if it is made to hold an iron chain, so that the elephant goes its way without reaching out for any other object, so also the ever-restless mind, which is trained and accustomed to a name or form through meditation or invocation, will steadily hold on to that alone.

When the mind is split up and dissipated into countless varying thoughts, each individual thought becomes extremely weak and inefficient. When, on the contray, such thoughts subside more and more till they finally get destroyed, the mind becomes one-pointed and, thereby acquiring strength and power of endurance, easily reaches perfection in the method of enquiry in quest of the Self.

Regulation of diet, restricting it to *sattvic* food[6], taken in moderate quantity, is of all the rules of conduct the best; and it is most conducive to the development of the *sattvic* qualities[7] of the mind. These, in their turn, assist one in the practice of *Atma vichara* or enquiry in quest of the Self.

Countless *vishaya-vasanas* (subtle tendencies of the mind in relation to objects of sense-gratification), coming one after the other in quick succession like the waves of the ocean, agitate the mind. Nevertheless they

[6] i.e. simple and nutritious food which sustains but does not stimulate the physical body.

[7] Purity of heart, self-restraint, evenness of temper, tenderness towards all beings, fortitude and freedom from desire, hatred and arrogance are the outstanding virtues of the *sattvic* mind.

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too subside and finally get destroyed with progressive practice *of Atma dhyana* or meditation on the Self.

Without giving room even to the thought which occurs in the form of doubt, whether it is possible to stay merely as the very Self, whether all the *vasanas* can be destroyed, one should firmly and unceasingly carry on meditation on the Self.

However sinful a person may be, if he would stop wailing inconsolably: 'Alas! I am a sinner, how shall I attain Liberation?' and, casting away even the thought that he is a sinner, if he would zealously carry on meditation on the Self, he would most assuredly get reformed.

So long as subtle tendencies continue to inhere in the mind, it is necessary to carry on the enquiry, 'Who am I?'

As and when thoughts occur, they should, one and all, be annihilated then and there, at the very place of their origin, by the method of enquiry in quest of the Self.

Not to desire anything extraneous to oneself constitutes *vairagya* (dispassion) or *nirasa* (desirelessness). Not to give up one's hold on the Self constitutes *jnana* (knowledge). But really *vairagya* and *janana* are one and the same. Just as the pearl-diver, tying stones to his waist, dives down into the depths, and gets the pearl from the sea-bed, so every aspirant, pledged to *vairagaya* can dive deep into himself and realize the precious Atman. If the earnest seeker would only cultivate the constant and deep contemplative 'remembrance' (*smrti*) of the true nature of the self till he has realized it, that alone would suffice. Distracting thoughts are like the enemy in the fortress. As long as they are in possession of it, they will certainly sally forth. But if, as and when they come out, you put them to the sword the fortress will finally be captured.

God and the Guru are not really different; they are identical. He that has earned the Grace of the Guru shall undoubtedly be saved and never forsaken, just as the prey that has fallen into the tiger's jaws will never be allowed to escape. But the disciple, for his part, should unswervingly follow the path shown by the Master.

Firm and disciplined inherence in the Atman without giving the least scope for the rise of any thought other than the deep contemplative thought of the Self, constitutes self-surrender to the Supreme Lord. Let any amount of burden be laid on Him, He will bear it all. It is, in fact, the indefinable power of the Lord that ordains, sustains and controls everything that happens. Why then, should we worry, tormented by vexatious thoughts, saying: 'Shall we act this way? No, that way' instead of meekly but happily

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submitting to that power? Knowing that the train carries all the weight, why indeed should we, the passengers travelling in it, carry our small individual articles of luggage on our laps to our great discomfort, instead of putting them aside and sitting at perfect ease?

That which is Bliss is also the Self. Bliss and the Self are not distinct and separate but are one and the same. And *That* alone is real. In no single one of the countless objects of the mundane world is there anything that can be called happiness. It is through sheer ignorance and unwisdom that we fancy that happiness is obtained from them. On the contrary, when the mind is externalized, it suffers pain and anguish. The truth is that every time our desires get fulfilled, the mind, turning to its source, experiences only that happiness which is natural to the Self. Similarly, in deep sleep, in spiritual trance (*samdhi*), when fainting, when a desired object is obtained, or when evil befalls an object considered undesirable, the mind turns inwards and enjoys that Bliss of *Atman*. Thus wandering astray forsaking the Self, and returning to it again and again is the interminable and wearisome lot of the mind.

It is pleasant under the shade of a tree and scorching in the heart of the sun outside. A person toiling in the sun seeks the cool shade of the tree and is happy under it. After staying there for a while, he moves out again but, unable to bear the merciless heat of the sun, he again seeks the shade. In this way he keeps on moving from shade to sun and sun to shade.

It is an unwise person who acts thus, whereas the wise man never leaves the shade: in the same way the mind of the Enlightened Sage (*Jnani*) never exists apart from *Brahman*, the Absolute. The mind of the ignorant on the other hand, entering into the phenomenal world, suffers pain and anguish; and then, turning for a short while towards *Brahman*, it experiences happiness. Such is the mind of the ignorant.

This phenomenal world, however, is nothing but thought. When the world recedes from one's view that is when one is free from thought the mind enjoys the Bliss of the Self. Conversely, when the world appears -- that is when thought occurs -- the mind experiences pain and anguish.

Not from any desire, resolve or effort on the part of the rising sun, but merely due to the presence of his rays, the lens emits heat, the lotus blossoms, water evaporates, and people attend to their various duties in life. In the proximity of the magnet the needle moves. Similarly the soul or *jiva*, subjected to the threefold activity of creation, preservation, and destruction which takes place merely due to the unique Presence of the Supreme Lord, performs acts in accordance with its karma,[8] and subsides to rest after such

[8] i.e., the fruits of past actions which are being worked out in the present life.

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activity. But the Lord Himself has no resolve; no act or event touches even the fringe of His Being. This state of immaculate aloofness can be likened to that of the sun, which is untouched by the activities of life, or to that of the all-pervasive ether, which is not affected by the interaction of the complex qualities of the other four elements.

All scriptures without any exception proclaim that for attaining Salvation, the mind should be subdued; and once one knows that control of the mind is their final aim, it is futile to make an interminable study of them. What is required for such control is actual enquiry into oneself by self-interrogation, "Who am I?" How can this enquiry in quest of the Self be made merely by means of a study of the scriptures?

One should realize the Self by the Eye of Wisdom. Does Rama need a mirror to recognize himself as Rama? That to which the 'I' refers is within the five sheaths,[9] whereas the scriptures are outside them. Therefore, it is futile to seek by means of the study of scriptures the Self that has to be realized by summarily rejecting even the five sheaths.

To enquire 'Who am I that am in bondage?' and to know one's real nature is alone Liberation. To keep the mind constantly turned within and to abide thus in the Self, is alone *Atma-vichara* (Self-enquiry), whereas *dhyana* (meditation) consists in fervent contemplation of the Self as *Sat-chit-Ananda* (Being-Consciousness-Bliss). Indeed, at some time, one will have to forget everything that has been learnt.

Just as it is futile to examine the rubbish that has to be swept up only to be thrown away, so it is futile for him who seeks to know the Self to set to work enumerating the *tattvas*[10] that envelop the Self and examining them instead of casting them away. He should consider the phenomenal world with reference to himself as merely a dream.

Except that the wakeful state is long and the dream state short, there is no difference between the two. All the activities of the dream state appear, for the time being, just as real as the activities of the wakeful state seem to be while awake. Only, during the dream state, the mind assumes another form or a different bodily sheath. For thoughts on the one hand and name and form on the other occur simultaneously during both the wakeful and dream states.

There are not two minds, one good and the other evil. It is only the *vasanas* or tendencies of the mind that are of two kinds, good and favourable, evil and unfavourable. When the mind is associated with the former it is called good; and when associated with the latter it is called evil. However

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9 These are the physical, vital, and mental sheaths, and the sheaths of knowledge -Experience and of Blissful-ignorance

10 *Tattvas* are the elements into which phenomenal existence-- from the subtle mind to gross matter - is classified.

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evil-minded other people may appear to you, it is not proper to hate or depise them. Likes and dislikes, love and hatred are equally to be eschewed. It is also not proper to let the mind often rest on objects or affairs of mundane life. As far as possible one should not interfere in the affairs of others. Everything offered to others is really an offering to oneself; and if only this truth were realized, who is there that would refuse anything to others?

If the ego rises, all else will also rise; if it subsides, all else will also subside. The deeper the humility with which we conduct ourselves, the better it is for us. If only the mind is kept under control, what matters it where one may happen to be?